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ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT SETS 95% A-THRESHOLD, RENEWS DEBATE AROUND GRADE INFLATION

QINLAN WANG / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Warner Hall, where many Economics courses are conducted and where faculty offices for the Economics department are located.

By MET LY
News Editor

This spring semester, the Middlebury Economics department instituted a department-wide threshold of 95% for an A-grade. The department previously had no standardized cutoff; prior to this policy, individual faculty members used 93%, 94%, or 95%.

The department oversees students majoring in Economics, and International Politics and Economics (IP&E) — which, when combined, accounted for nearly 25% of last year's graduating class. Currently there are 388 Economics majors and 147 IP&E majors.

Erick Gong, professor of economics and a faculty member who helped lead the effort, said the policy emerged from concerns about grade inflation.

"As a department, we have been looking at the grade distribution, and we were like 'Wow, we give a lot of As,'" Gong said in an interview with the Campus. "We would like the A to be a meaningful reflection of mastery."

According to Gong, last year, 48% of grades awarded in

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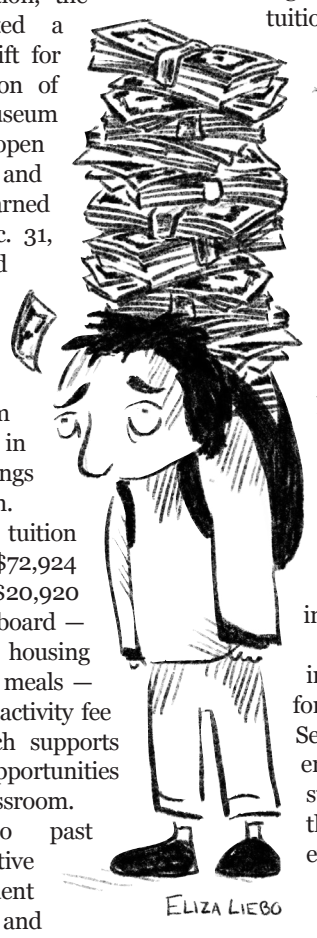
Board of Trustees talk tuition increase and improved budget deficit

By MAYA ALEXANDER
Editor at Large

During its virtual Feb. 6–7 winter meeting, the Middlebury Board of Trustees approved a comprehensive fee of $94,386 for the 2026–2027 academic year, a 4% increase over the fees for this current academic year. In addition, the Board accepted a $20 million gift for the construction of a new arts museum scheduled to open in fall 2028, and trustees learned that as of Dec. 31, the projected budget deficit had been reduced to $4.49 million from $8.61 million in October, a savings of $4.12 million.



The new tuition total includes $72,924 for tuition, $20,920 for room and board — which covers housing and unlimited meals — and a student activity fee of $542, which supports student opportunities outside the classroom.

Similar to past years, Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration David Provost said this year's increase is comparable to Middlebury's peer institutions.

"We try to maintain [ourselves] to be in the middle," Provost said, which was reflected in a Sept. 2025 report seen by The Campus during an interview with Provost. The report compared Middlebury's comprehensive fee with those of 20 peer institutions.

Provost stated that two other variables are the recruiting and retaining of talent, faculty, and staff, as well as food costs and utilities. He also underscored the college's commitment to keeping tuition increases steady each year, even though tuition would have risen about 7% if it had kept pace with cost increases.

"Last year, one of the biggest driving impacts was that food costs were up 10% or 12%. We would never pass on that level of an increase. We still try to maintain this 3% to 4% range," he said, emphasizing the college's success in doing so, even in the last couple of years coming out of a high inflation time frame.

Despite the tuition increase, Vice President for Student Financial Services Kim Downs-Burns emphasized that the Board stays committed to meeting the full financial need of every admitted student and that someone's financial background does not factor into their admission

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Office of Communications and Marketing announces the launch of MiddStories

By MAJA MUSA
Contributing Writer

On Feb. 16, the student body received an email from the Office of Communications and Marketing announcing the launch of MiddStories, a digital hub for Middlebury news, commentary, features, and multimedia storytelling. The email described MiddStories as "a place to learn the latest news, to consider informed commentary from Middlebury people, and to engage in stories both large and small that will speak to the Middlebury experience."

Matt Jennings, the editorial director of MiddStories, said that the intention of the platform would be to provide "a place where people can go regularly to be informed, whether they are an internal audience (faculty, staff, students) or an external audience that knows Middlebury well or wants to learn about Middlebury," in an interview with the Campus.

Apart from providing news about on-campus events and

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THE MIDD SNOW CORPS; BEHIND THE 50-PERSON EFFORT TO CLEAR SNOW EACH MORNING

By KAI ARROWOOD
News Editor

KAI ARROWOOD / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

An inside look at the storage building where the Facilities team keeps their snow removal equipment reveals a battalion of snow shovels and snowblowers at the ready, which are regularly used by a 55-person snow removal team throughout the winter.

In a town that receives an average of 80 inches of snow a year, Middlebury's snow removal team shoulders a heavy responsibility. Yet with a recent uptick in extreme weather conditions and a statewide salt shortage, Facilities staff are navigating an increasingly unpredictable winter landscape.

Of the 55 Facilities staff assigned to snow removal, 35–40 work as shovelers, while the remainder operate snow blowers, plows and tractors. All of their work occurs hours before the campus wakes up, with plowing starting at anywhere from 2:30 to 4:00 a.m. and shoveling beginning at 6:00 am. Ideally, all snow removal work ceases before students and faculty begin traversing the campus.

"Shoveling sounds worse than it is. It's cold, you're outside working, you start in the dark and it generally takes about three hours," Tim Parsons, landscape horticulturist and visiting Architecture Studies lecturer, wrote in a message to The Campus. "But you're surrounded by help, friends and co-workers all working together, and you get it done."

Facilities boasts an armada of shovels, snow blowers, tractors and plows. The college's salt supply is a nearly 15-foot pile in a small garage outside of Facilities Services.

Luther Tenny, director of facilities services, has served alongside Landscape Services Supervisor Clinton Snyder as the college's de facto meteorologist for more than a decade. The two of them track weather systems across a wide range of online forecasting platforms to formulate the timeline of snow removal.

"I can't tell you the number of linked weather sites I have that I

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By SIMON SCHMEIDER

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By VICTOR KORTE

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Economics department sets 95% A threshold, renews debate around grade inflation

QINLAN WANG / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The Axinn Center at Starr Library, another common location for Economics courses.

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Economics were As — a figure that rises to over 70% when A- are included — which is relatively in line with college trends, according to Gong.

Gong said grade inflation can discourage academic risk-taking.

"[Grade inflation] creates these perverse incentives [where] students are desperately afraid to get an A- so they no longer are taking risks. They're going to just take classes where [they] know [they're] going to get an A," Gong said. "That is antithetical to a liberal arts education."

These developments are part of a nationwide conversation many colleges are having about grade inflation. At Harvard, a 2025 report — which Gong consistently referenced — found that more than 60% of grades awarded are As, leading to a faculty proposed 20% cap on As.

While the policy only affects the A and A- grades, it is also meant to have a trickle-down effect on the rest of the scale.

"We think that this policy actually helps students," Gong said. "[With the current policy,] if a student gets a B+, they're going to think 'Oh! It's the end of the world' but that's not the case. If you have higher grading standards [...] a B becomes more meaningful."

"[Only] the small percentage of students between the 93% and 95% threshold [are actually going to be affected]," Gong said. Based on data from the past three years, the department's introductory-level courses would most likely be the least affected, according to him.

Obie Porteous, associate professor of economics, said the new cutoff would have little impact on his courses. Porteous previously set his A-threshold at 94%.

"I am adjusting my rubrics, so I am not expecting the change in cutoffs to change the number of students getting different grades in my classes," Porteous said. "I have always tried to maintain a high standard for an A grade in my classes because I believe that As should recognize excellence. I am not changing these high standards."

One concern circulating among students is that grade deflation measures could have lasting effects on their post-graduate plans.

"Middlebury is systematically at a disadvantage [compared to] places [...] like Wharton that have the business and finance classes that give their students an edge. There is a complete difference between 4.0 at Middlebury and a 4.0 at Wharton," Klaé Parchment '28 said. "Making it even harder for students to get a high GPA [here] just puts us at a further disadvantage for hiring, irrespective of how much knowledge we have."

"I think that most employers and grad schools have no clue whether or not Midd changes grading policies, and unless it's simultaneously occurring at other institutions, then grads may be at a relative disadvantage to others," Jeffrey Teh '28 said. "Iit still is necessary otherwise grades and latin honors are no longer a useful metric for employers and grad schools to determine who's a strong performer or not"

In an email to the Campus, Bob Crawley '94, a managing director at Moelis & Company, a global investment bank, said grades remain important in economics-related fields.

"No recruiter would appreciate that Midd has a higher standard to get an A, so it just seems like there would be downside risk from the student's perspective," Crawley wrote.

Gong said the department was careful not to take any drastic steps.

"We don't want this to dramatically harm people's career prospects."

"I've talked to recruiters; a lot of them don't think grades are meaningful anymore because of grade inflation," Gong said.

Executive Director of Middlebury's Center for Careers and Internships (CCI), Ursula Olender, offered a more measured view.

"Grades still matter, particularly as an initial screening tool, but they are only one part of how employers and graduate programs evaluate Middlebury students," Orlender said. "Recruiters consistently tell us they're looking beyond GPA to assess analytical thinking, communication skills, teamwork, and leadership, as well as how students have applied their learning through internships, research, and other experiences."

Gong emphasized that the policy is still in its early stages.

"We are moving in a small incremental step," Gong said. "We are going to look at the results, the grade distributions, and course response forms. We will also be in contact with the CCI [to see] how recruiting is being affected. We are going to take these inputs and come together as a department [...] and see what we are going to do from here."

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING ANNOUNCES THE LAUNCH OF MIDDSTORIES

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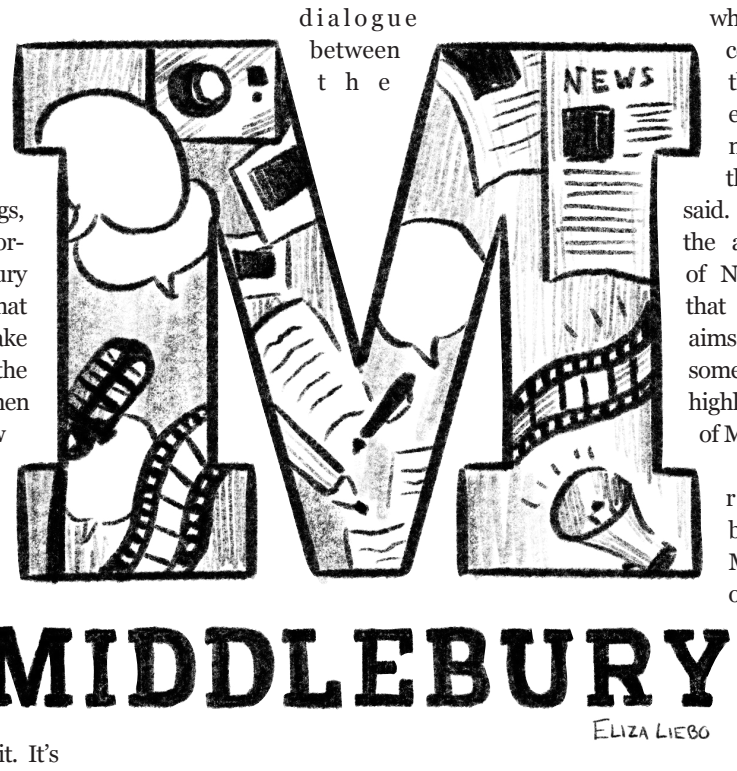
initiatives, MiddStories will highlight specific stories of Middlebury's internal community or alumni. According to Jennings, these stories will be written by the Office of Communication and Marketing, as well as community members who are willing to reach out with articles or personal essays. Ava Raiser '28, said that she "would love to see student and alumni stories, as long as there is a diversity of interests and career paths."

Each Thursday, students will receive a MiddStories newsletter, which will include a few stories that can be found on the website. On the newsletter format, Raiser said that "so many things have newsletters today. In the beginning, I read them. Later on, there are just too many."

Jennings responded to these concerns, saying that he understands "the email and newsletter fatigue" students face. He said that if the emails do not draw enough attention, MiddStories will develop TikTok videos or Instagram content to engage students. When asked whether MiddStories will have its own social media accounts, Jennings said "Right now, we are using the College's main accounts to share stories, but it's an interesting idea, especially Instagram. Possibly. But right now, we're starting out with the institution's main accounts."

To interest students, MiddStories aims to "reach out with content that students would gravitate toward," Jennings said.

Right now, MiddStories imports multiple articles from Middlebury Magazine. Jennings, who is also the editor-in-chief of Middlebury Magazine, said that MiddStories will take inspiration from the magazine. When asked about how repetition would be avoided, Jennings responded: "We can't just assume that because we publish something in the Middlebury Magazine, everybody has seen it. It's just expanding the reach of those pieces. It's trying to maximize the number of eyeballs we get on those stories."



Talking about MiddStories as an effort of the Office of Communications and Marketing, Nawale Nachula '28 said that she feels a rupture between the student body and the administration. They have a lot of understanding of technicalities, but not so much of the reality of student life. MiddStories could be a way to open up a nice dialogue between the admin and students in a very honest and creative way."

Jennings said that it is MiddStories' goal to bridge the distance between the Administrative staff in Middlebury and the student body. "The hope is that MiddStories will reflect who we are without it feeling institutional. There will be times where there are news stories, for instance, that feel institutional, but we want essays, we want the vignettes that we publish to feel personal to people, and hopefully, when students see content that reflects their personal experience, it will mean more to them," Jennings said. He referenced the account "Humans of New York," saying that MiddStories aims to achieve something similar by highlighting the people of Middlebury.

On the relationship between MiddStories and other campus publications, Jennings said, "We're keeping track of when Middlebury and Middlebury people appear in The New York Times or National Geographic or on a podcast, and so we want to say 'Hey, here are some places where Middlebury has appeared in other publications.' It doesn't have to be our publication in a way. It generates a source of interest and pride when Middlebury is written about in other places, or when a Middlebury person appears somewhere in some places. We would include it on MiddStories, and when you click on it, it would take you to the original source. We don't feel like we need to have a sense of pride of ownership over that."

The MiddStories website has over 400 pages right now, including articles written in January 1997. Jennings said that this is because the website will also serve as an archive to older pieces written about Middlebury. The archive is still incomplete, but the aim is to "have easily accessible archives of previously published stories, just because that's part of the historical record." This way, students could have easily accessible writings by Middlebury students, as well as pieces written about Middlebury.

Anyone who has an idea for a story or essay can reach out via email to Matt Jennings or to the official MiddStories email. "Even if someone has a kernel of an idea and they're not sure whether it's an essay or a story or maybe a photo essay or maybe a video, reach out and we're happy to talk to people and work with them on what's possible."

The Midd snow corps; behind the 50-person effort to clear snow each morning

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know how to interpret the forecast for this area," Tenny said in an interview with The Campus. "We try to make a decision the night before on how early our plows or shovelers may come in."

A storm typically begins in the afternoon and continues through the night, tapering off in the morning. Snow removal begins once the storm has largely ceased.

Snow removal teams prioritize high-traffic areas on campus and move from the center of campus outward when plowing after a storm. Dining halls, where staff arrive early to start food preparation, are at the top of the list. Groups of five to six shovelers are then assigned to a cluster of buildings, tractors are used to clear sidewalks and plows are used to clear college-owned streets.

Storrs Avenue, Chateau Road, Freeman Way and streets that run through campus are managed by the college, while the remainder are cleared by the town of Middlebury. Some college properties down South Main Street, which are difficult for the college's snow removal team to reach, are contracted to external snow removal services.

"I had no idea when I started what snow removal on a campus entails. Every walk, every door, every fire exit and balcony. Walk around and count how many doors this school has, I dare you," Parsons wrote.

"Fortunately, it has been a relatively typical winter, with temperatures cold enough to keep the snow dry and easier to manage," Tenny said. In the 20 years Parsons has worked on snow removal at Middlebury, there have only been a few official snow days. During a Valentine's Day storm in 2007, when Middlebury received two and a half feet of snow, Parsons was unable to drive home and slept on the floor of the services building.

In the past few years, according to Tenny, precipitation events would come through with warmer moisture. Sleet and melting snow are much more difficult to remove and require more thorough salting of walkways.

Interruptions in salt supply are common in winter, but occurred earlier and for a longer period of time this year. Salt is transported via train from port cities like Boston, New York, Baltimore and some in the Great Lakes area. Facilities noticed a delivery disruption in early January and have since rationed their stockpile.

The Vermont Agency of Transportation has priority for salt delivery to manage higher-speed roads, while towns have the second-highest priority. Institutions like Middlebury come third. Due to the drier snow conditions and extreme cold this winter, Tenny believes the college has enough salt to manage the slippery conditions expected in the spring.

"Salt is especially needed in March, when you get the thawing during the day and then re-freezing at night," Tenny said.

As climate change intensifies, Middlebury can expect more extreme weather, but Tenny believes that the area will still receive snow every winter. The facilities team is focused on preparing for potentially higher-wind, higher-intensity storms in the years to come.

"It's more about preparing for the extreme events," Tenny said. "If you can handle the extreme events, then the others are just easy to take care of."

BOARD OF TRUSTEES TALK TUITION INCREASE AND IMPROVED BUDGET DEFICIT

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to Middlebury.

"While we're reflecting a 4% increase this upcoming academic year, our grant increase for aid recipients is anywhere from a 6% to 7%. It's always much more than the actual comprehensive fee increase," Downs-Burns said. "If the 4% represents a $1,500 increase, anyone who's on financial aid gets the corresponding dollar amount in an increase package, dollar for dollar."

Provost asserted that the tuition increase and the budget deficit at Middlebury and at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS), though now projected to be at $6.73 million, down from last year's $8.37, are not correlated.

"The Board has authorized us to separate college and schools in Monterey. Monterey, because we've now announced that we're no longer accepting students, is considered a discontinued operation," Provost said.

"The conversation that the Board is having is we will at some point make a determination what we're going to do with the Monterey campus. That is an asset. If we sell any assets of Monterey, that will offset the deficits for Monterey. We are not putting the burden of Monterey on the undergraduate college or the Schools [Abroad and Language Schools]," Provost said.

Moreover, Provost stressed that the cuts to retirement benefits last April did not factor into this year's tuition increase, also explaining that Middlebury does not rely on tuition for its endowment. Rather, the college was living significantly beyond its means, according to Provost, adding that benefits for faculty and staff differ from peer institutions.

"Our retirement plan was one of the best in higher education, better than some of the wealthiest schools," he said. "We made some structural changes to our healthcare plan because we had one of the richest healthcare plans in American higher education, so it was really just recalibrating to live within our means. We do not feel comfortable passing on a 10% tuition increase to our students so that we can have the best retirement plan."

"If we had the best endowment, I could justify that because it's not coming from the students, it's coming from donors. That's not the case. The cuts that you saw were related to what the college and schools need to do independent of the board's decision about Monterey."

Provost was confident that Middlebury is on a path now to balancing the budget for the college and schools, and also emphasized its commitment to its people.

Downs-Burns echoed this sentiment, expressing that most of all, the school wants to give every student the most of their Middlebury experience.

"While this looks like a high cost on paper, the cost to educate truly is even more than that when you look at faculty salaries, when you look at everything that's included," Downs-Burns said.

"Once you've arrived, it's our job to ensure you have every opportunity at your disposal, and you can say this was the right choice. And we can look at your parent, relative or family and say we are so happy that you made the decision to send your child here, your student here, and that you don't regret it," she said.

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HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OF ADDISON COUNTY OPENS NEW HOME

By SAGE KELLER
Contributing Writer

Habitat for Humanity of Addison County (HfHAC) hosted an open house on Feb. 7 at 35 Gorham Lane, inviting the Middlebury community to tour the organization's newest build and meet the family who will soon call it home. The event marked a milestone for the all-volunteer nonprofit, which has been working to address Addison County's affordable housing crisis since its founding in 1997.

Despite the cold weather, neighbors came out to the location in strong numbers to meet the Deroberts-Goodin family. Carl, Elaina, and their two sons are set to move in March of 2026. "They are excited to be part of the community and put down roots, and the boys are thrilled to have their own bedrooms and room to play! The whole family is happy knowing they have a home with a yard and space to grow," Blair Kloman, the current president of HfHAC, said in an email to The Campus.

Kloman described the organization as entirely volunteer-run, with a 16-member board that meets monthly at a donated space in a local church. There is no office, no paid staff and no overhead to speak of, meaning that every dollar donated goes directly toward building homes for families in need.

"Affordable housing is not low-income housing," Kloman said. "We provide starter homes for moderate-income families by selling our houses well below appraisal and offering no-interest loans."

For many families, the monthly mortgage ends up being less than what they were previously paying in rent, and the long-term costs of living in an HfHAC home are kept low through the organization's commitment to energy efficiency.

"Like all of our recent homes, 35 Gorham Lane is highly energy efficient," Kloman said. "We partner with local vendors, including Efficiency VT and solar panel manufacturers, to make sure our homes are as close as possible to net-zero performance."

Each build is designed by college architecture students in Associate Professor of Architecture John McLeod's studio, which has been dedicated exclusively to Habitat designs since 2019. McLeod, an architect based in Middlebury and owner of McLeod Architects, has made the collaboration a cornerstone of his studio's work.

"It's a team of students that take the classes, and under my guidance and my colleague Sam Ostrow's guidance, they do everything involved with the process from initial site analysis and outreach to neighbors, to researching zoning requirements and other permitting requirements, then conceiving of a design and exploring design possibilities that we as a team are pleased with and the client, Habitat for Humanity, is pleased with," McLeod said.

The partnership reflects a broader philosophy within HfHAC of integrating the organization into the fabric of the local community, drawing on local talent, vendors and volunteers to get homes built.

"It's a partnership between Middlebury College, Habitat for Humanity of Addison County, and my architecture practice, or firm, which is based here in Middlebury, McLeod Architects," McLeod said.

The studio has produced 10 homes so far, each meeting Vermont's highest energy-performance standards. Through partnerships with Efficiency VT and local solar panel manufacturers, HfHAC works to bring every home as close to net-zero carbon emissions as possible, meaning families save on heating, cooling, and maintenance costs for years to come.

The selection process for families is thorough, according to Kloman.

"We're looking for families who have lived and worked in Addison County for at least a year and can manage a mortgage responsibly. Their current housing situation is usually inadequate or substandard — such as severe structural problems, poor heating, overcrowding or unsafe or unsanitary conditions," she said.

Once selected, families are asked to contribute a minimum of 200 hours to the building of their own home, either on-site or behind the scenes. Additionally, families must complete a series of homeowner workshops.

"We provide families with homeowner workshops to prepare for successful home ownership — paying bills, maintaining property, taxes, etc.," Kloman said. Families also participate in the building of their home, whether on-site or behind the scenes, for a minimum of 200 hours. "It can be a lot of fun and feel very rewarding to be involved," Kloman added.

The Gorham Lane development represents the kind of long-term, neighborhood-scale thinking that defines HfHAC's approach. Two more homes are planned for the same neighborhood. "We have two more homes to complete in the Gorham Lane neighborhood. There's also a scale model of the whole area in a case right adjacent to the properties (by the road) so you can get the overall picture of how it will look," Kloman said.

BLAIR KLOMAN / COURTESY PHOTO

The Middlebury Community Gathered to welcome the Deroberts-Goodin family to their new home on Gorham Lane.

BLAIR KLOMAN/ COURTESY PHOTO

Habitat for Humanity builds one of its four sites in the Gorham Lane neighborhood.

The organization aims to build one home per year, a modest but steady pace that reflects the realities of running an entirely volunteer-driven operation.

For college students, the organization offers a meaningful way to get involved in the broader community. Volunteers are welcome on-site on Wednesdays and Thursdays, led by a volunteer Head Builder, and no construction experience is required.

Braveny Mubuuke '29 expressed her excitement about the possibility of volunteering with HfHAC.

"I didn't know about this opportunity until now, and I'm looking forward to learning more and engaging as a volunteer," Mubuuke said.

Beyond volunteering, the organization relies heavily on donations to keep its work going. Individual contributions, federal and non-federal grants, and community partnerships all help fund each build.

For the Deroberts-Goodin family, 35 Gorham Lane is a place to grow, a yard for the kids, and a place to put down roots in the Middlebury community. And for the volunteers and board members of HfHAC, that outcome is the whole point.

Students interested in volunteering can reach out at hfhmiddvolunteer@gmail.com and share their skills and availability. More information about Habitat for Humanity of Addison County, including how to apply, volunteer or donate, can be found at addisonhabitat.org.

"We always need volunteers of all types and levels. If you've got building skills, organizational skills, clerical skills, fundraising skills...you can help! We welcome your assistance even if you can't drive a nail," Kloman said.

Editor's Note: Senior Local Editor Katrina Schwarz '26 contributed reporting to this article.

INDIVISIBLE MIDDLEBURY HOSTS MONTHLY INTERFAITH VIGIL

By DYLAN MCGINTY
Staff Writer

On Friday, Feb. 27, at 5:30 pm, Middlebury Indivisible will host a half-hour interfaith vigil at the Town Hall Theater Plaza, with the goal of fostering unity amid the diversity of religious beliefs.

Middlebury Indivisible is a volunteer-led grassroots organization affiliated with the national Indivisible movement, which focuses on defending democratic institutions and advancing progressive priorities through community organizing and protest. The vigil, held on the third Friday of each month, grew out of discussions within the Indivisible Middlebury Mutual Aid group, a local chapter dedicated to nonviolence and community engagement.

"We were thinking there might be people from all faith and wisdom traditions who would be interested in a quiet vigil to express our hopes for peace, justice and compassion — both nationally and globally," Theresa Gleason, one of the vigil's organizers said.

The monthly vigils feature spiritual readings interspersed with extended periods of silence and meditative prayer, concluding with a closing song sung collectively by participants of all traditions.

"At our vigils we welcome people of all wisdom traditions to join us for a peace vigil, which will offer readings interspersed with periods of silence for reflection, prayer, and meditation. We close by joining our voices in song," Gleason said.

During the fall, two vigils were held in Middlebury's Marble Works District overlooking Otter Creek. The events were hosted less frequently during the winter due to travel challenges and scheduling conflicts. Looking ahead to the spring, organizers hope to return the vigils to their original location near the Marble Works Amphitheater, according to Gleason.

Susan Vinge, a member of the interfaith vigils planning committee, shared insight into the impetus behind the events.

"One of the things that those of us who are on the planning committee for these vigils feel is that it was important to be able to bring in the fact that the issues that we are facing, injustice, and division, and hate, are bigger than just people [....] That gives people the chance to gather in a different tone. It's not a protest, protests are super important, but it's not a demonstration, it's a lifting up of our hearts and concerns," she said.

Indivisible Middlebury has played a visible role in civic engagement efforts across Addison County, including organizing the "No Kings" protest in the town last October.

"Indivisible Middlebury is a collective of concerned neighbors who believe when individuals come together, we create real people power," Indivisible Middlebury's press and media lead Jennifer Wasuira said.

According to its website, the national organization was founded in 2016 to confront democratic backsliding in America and facilitate nationwide demonstrations. Middlebury's Indivisible chapter aims to foster dialogue among the various groups present in American society, alongside the goals of the national organization.

"[We are calling] on people of all wisdom and traditions to join us. Short readings on peace, justice, and compassion will be followed with a moment of silence. We'll close with a song for solidarity and hope," Wasuira said.

Susan Vinge echoed this sentiment.

"Our goal is to have monthly vigils. The purpose is to draw people together regardless of doctrine, or religion, or no religion, but the practice is to have respectful presence for each person so that people can come together around a shared purpose," she said.

This month's vigil coincides with the overlap of Ramadan and Lent, two significant observances in Islam and Christianity, respectively.

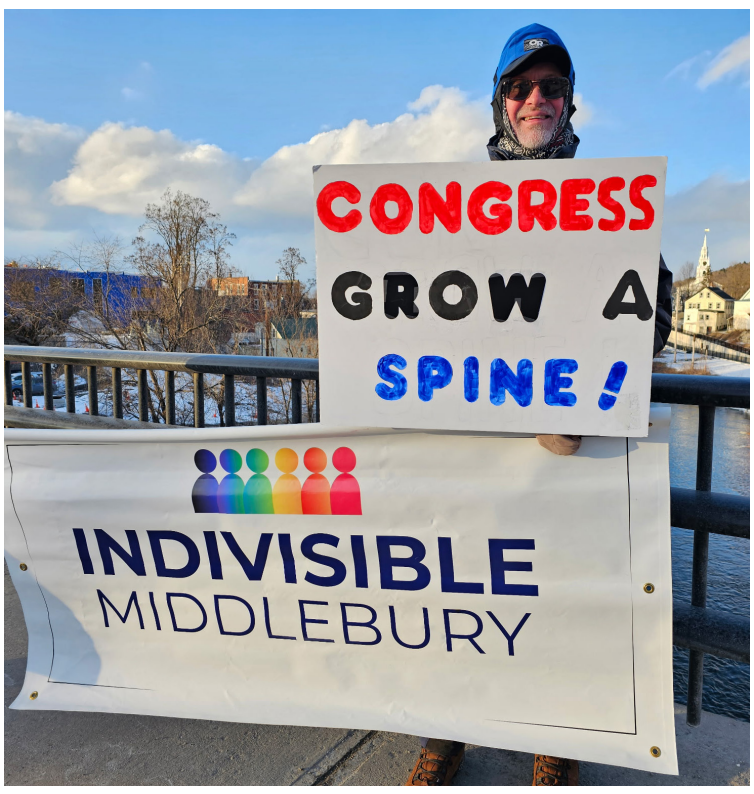
Although Vermont is classified by the Pew Research Center as the least religious state in the U.S., with only 13% of residents responding that they are "highly religious," there is a wide variety of religions present on the college's campus and within Addison County.

The Charles P. Scott Center for Spiritual and Religious Life has previously organized interfaith dialogues, such as one hosted within the Rohatyn Global Scholars program this fall, during which four of the college's chaplains engaged with first-year students and discussed the similarities and differences within their religious practices.

"It was inspiring to see how each religious leader had an answer that the others could all agree with, that there was only difference in how each would frame their response rather than a difference in their sentiments," Ronen Israel '29 said.

Indivisible Middlebury is seeking additional input on how to improve its events and expand outreach. Students practicing any religion are encouraged to attend the event on Friday, as the organizers offer a spiritual and educational experience.

Editor's Note: Senior Local Editor Katrina Schwarz '26 contributed reporting to this article.



JENNIFER WASUIRA/ COURTESY PHOTO

Indivisible Middlbury protests Congress in dowtown Middlebury.

'FIRST FRIDAYS' BOOST DOWNTOWN MIDDLEBURY BUSINESSES, KEEPS SHOPS OPEN LATE

BETTER MIDDLEBURY PARTNERSHIP / COURTESY PHOTO

The Better Middlebury Parnership revived "First Fridays" on February 6th, and plan to continue in the coming monthsl

By LILA DELUCA
Staff Writer

On the first Friday of every month, over 20 local businesses in downtown Middlebury stay open late as a part of the Better Middlebury Partnership's (BMP) newly reintroduced "First Fridays" initiative — an evening dedicated to drawing the community into Middlebury's restaurants, galleries and shops, emphasizing the importance of local connection especially during the quieter winter months. This February's "First Fridays" night featured fully-booked pop-up dinners at Haymaker Bun Company and ShireTown Marketplace, shopping at local spots such as the Vermont Bookshop and Middleton, an art exhibition at PhotoPlace Gallery and many other highlights from local businesses.

The "First Fridays" initiative, revived by Better Middlebury Partnership's co-directors, Kathryn Torres and Kelly Flynn, represents the community-based non-profit's larger efforts to ensure that Middlebury remains a wonderful place to live, work, and play.

Torres emphasized BMP's desire to cultivate an atmosphere in downtown Middlebury that unites the college's student body with the greater Middlebury community.

"We want the vibrancy of campus transferred down to town," Torres said in an interview with The Campus.

According to Torres, the concept behind Middlebury's "First Fridays" was inspired by "Midd Kid Night" in December, which, in partnership with the College's Student Government Association, the College's President's Office and the BMP, features festive events and opportunities for students to stroll and shop with friends. In part, the goal of the "First Fridays" initiative is to achieve the same level of foot traffic in downtown Middlebury as during "Midd Kid Night."

"January, February and March can be very quiet months in Vermont. People tend to hibernate, but they are craving community and coming together," Torres said.

Torres added that the "First Fridays" night in February was small, sweet and everything the BMP could have hoped for by launching an initiative during, arguably, Vermont's slowest month.

Caroline Corrente, owner of Haymaker Bun Company, recently hosted "First Fridays Haymaker at Night." The pasta pop-up is a familiar staple for Middlebury locals and students alike, who have long frequented these evening events.

Corrente noted that Haymaker's monthly pasta pop-up dinners stemmed from The Arcadian, a restaurant led by Corrente's husband, Matt, that ran in the same space as Haymaker at 7 Bakery Lane, serving handmade pasta dishes and Italian fare.

Corrent noted that the concept for these pop-ups stems from The Arcadian, the Italian restaurant formerly run by her husband, Matt, in the same location. Corrente shared that the current dinners are a nod to that legacy of pasta and traditional dishes.

"Now, monthly pasta popups are a creative outlet for [Matt]. People loved the Arcadian," Corrente said.

Besides Haymaker's pasta pop-ups, Corrente and her team are constantly planning other community-minded events in partnership with the bakery that underscore her background in non-profit work.

Events such as Haymaker's Galentine's Karaoke Night, which took place on February 13th in support of Atria Collective, represented not only Haymaker but also the greater Middlebury community's initiative to cultivate spaces that drive social impact and community gathering.

"In Middlebury, we tend to work in silos; it's important for us to team up and support each other. While food is our forefront, the part that is most important to me is creating a sense of community in our locations and seeing people use our space for that brings me the most joy," Corrente said.

For the upcoming "First Fridays" evenings, Haymaker will combine its pasta pop-up and karaoke events to attract a diverse audience, including young families with kids, students at the College, and older couples.

While the bookings for Haymaker's pasta pop-ups fill up quickly, students from the College often attend to enjoy great food with friends off campus.

Ron Turcios '27, who works at Haymaker with the front-of-house staff, noted the diverse mix between students and locals.

"Lots of student athletes from the college have attended the pasta pop-up. The most recent one was nearly fifty-fifty students and locals," Turcios said.

Additionally, in an interview with the Campus, Lauren Guircio '26 praised the event and the environment it provides.

"The Haymaker pasta pop-ups are always an event to look forward to — pasta and dinner menus are truly delicious, and the atmosphere is perfect for a special meal with friends."

Other places in town have also been experimenting with this pop-up concept. ShireTown Marketplace, for instance, began hosting reservation-based pop-ups in collaboration with the BMP's "First Fridays" initiative. The first pop-up dinner featured an English pub-themed menu and, according to husband-and-wife duo owners Kevin and Dani Archambeault, drew a full house, welcoming both regulars and new faces.

For the upcoming "First Fridays" evening, ShireTown is planning to host a Cajun-themed pop-up, but Kevin and Dani also have other ideas brewing, such as a ramen-themed night.

The next "First Fridays" evening will be on March 8th, during which Torres and the greater BMP team hope to continue the momentum and excitement from February by raising the event's visibility. Some ideas to do so, according to Torres, include hanging "First Fridays" flags around town, integrating music events into the night and involving student organizations and societies from the College into the evening's schedule.

"We want to dovetail with as many local businesses as possible," Torres said.

Students should look out for more information regarding the March 8th "First Fridays" evening on the BMP's blog and follow @experiencemiddlebury on social media platforms such as Instagram for up-to-date information about events at various local businesses throughout downtown Middlebury.

DEBATE ME BRO

Op-Ed

***Zach Marcus** is a member of the class of 2027.*

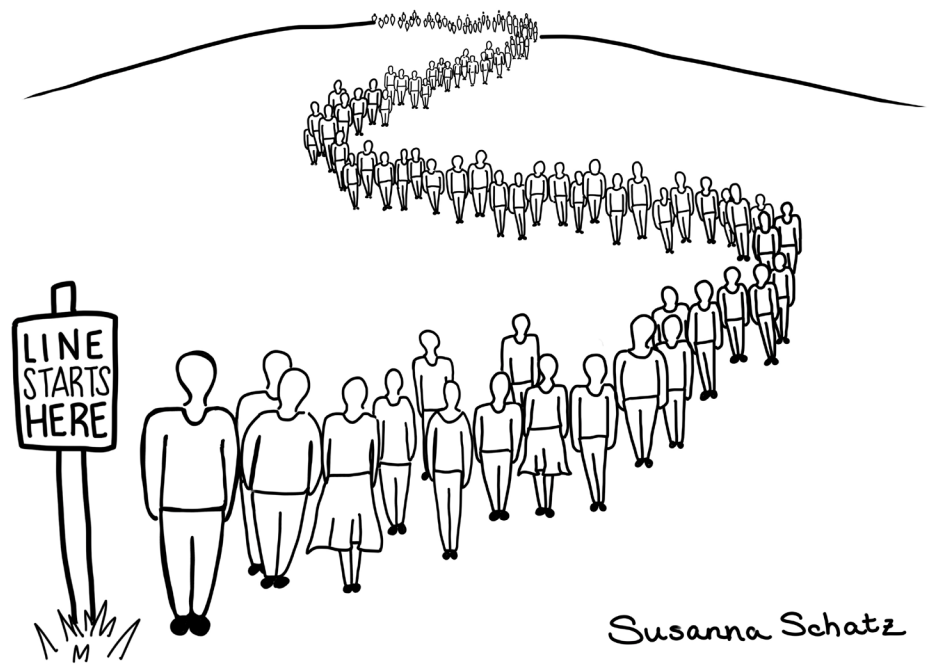
In March 2024, the Middlebury College Republicans (MCR) was revived, with new president Joseph Jacobson '27 framing the club as a necessary corrective to a stifling campus culture "opposed to free speech." In another piece written on behalf of MCR, Jacobson reiterated that "advocacy for freedom of expression... [is] the first priority for our club."

Maybe this could've worked a decade earlier, back when the illiberal strain of social justice politics was at its apogee and MAGA's revulsion to "wokeness" sometimes appeared as First Amendment absolutism. Today we know better. What animates the conservative movement is not a scrupulous defense of speech, but the reflexive desire to impose a cruder version of anti-wokeness as cultural hegemony. In the words of one MAGA-supportive finance worker, celebrating the day after Trump's re-election: "I feel liberated. We can say 'retard' and 'pussy' without getting cancelled."

And it's true — you really can use those lovely slurs now. Unfortunately, to make room, some other phrases had to go. "Gulf of Mexico" is officially out. If you scribble it down somewhere, your press credentials to cover the White House will be revoked. Meanwhile, students on F-1 visas who utter the words "free Palestine" risk detention and deportation; their university will also be sued. Even seemingly anodyne words — "disability," "woman" and "abortion" — are now all viewed with suspicion by the federal government. Today, joining MCR to support free speech would be like joining an O.J. Simpson fan club to end domestic violence.

But put aside the hypocrisy. The more troubling component of MCR's evangelism is that they lazily import the rationale for free speech absolutism from political society into the university, without considering that different settings demand different regulatory regimes. "College isn't a safe space," Jacobson begins his second piece, blithely parroting the most thought-terminating cliché in the conservative culture-warrior canon. What he means is that Middlebury should abstain from regulating speech because "safety is freedom from physical harm, not from disagreeable ideas." Even proscribing hate speech is suspect, with Jacobson wondering, "Who gets to decide what is and isn't hate speech?" Best, in MCR's view, to do nothing. "All speakers, regardless of how 'controversial' they are, should be encouraged to speak at Middlebury," Jacobson concludes.

The legal scholar Jamal Greene, in his lucid book "How Rights Went Wrong", illustrates the folly of MCR's approach. It's legal for a man to ogle a woman who walks by and yell, "Nice tits," he writes. It's also permissible for a white person to walk up to a non-white one and say, "You don't belong here." Obviously, people shouldn't do those things, but we also understand why they're allowed: Incivility is the price we pay to live in a democracy. But just because the government shouldn't prohibit that speech in the public square doesn't mean it deserves protection in an educational setting. At college, it's important that students feel free to express themselves, but it's also important that students feel welcome. Harassment



and campus speech disputes generally should be resolved by examining the individual facts of each case and weighing the competing interests involved, rather than — as MCR likes to do — portentously proclaiming an absolute, inviolable right which trumps all other considerations.

When it comes to campus speakers: why does a toddler whose vocabulary consists only of the words "six" and "seven" deserve to speak? Why does someone who believes that slavery is good merit an invitation? Instead of asserting that everyone is entitled to an audience of college students, Greene recommends asking students to demonstrate how a requested speaker would reasonably advance a school's mission.

We could go through more examples, but the logic remains the same: Granting students total freedom is fundamentally incompatible with education because education (what Gayatri Spivak, Indian literary critic, called "the non-coercive rearranging of desire") necessitates the curation and discrimination of speech. As law professor Paul Horwitz explained in his book "First Amendment Institutions", colleges "are laboratories for democracy, not laboratories of democracy: they contribute to democratic discourse, but not by following its rules."

So far, I've mainly quoted from Jacobson's second op-ed, his free-speech-warrior tract. But he also wrote an earlier piece, one in which he envisions MCR as "an outlet for people to express their repressed conservative views." He then warns against bullying MCR members, citing Middlebury's Non-Discrimination Policy to remind students that "it is disrespectful to [...] stereotype another student based on what you think you know about them." The two pieces don't cohere. Absent in the first one is the contempt for safe spaces; instead, Jacobson is overtly creating one. Gone, too, is the absolutist defense of speech; here, MCR is actually invoking the policy responsible for Middlebury's horrendous free speech ranking (which, ironically, is the only piece of evidence MCR musters to demonstrate campus censorship).

The legal theorist Stanley Fish argued that "concepts like free speech do not have 'natural' content [...] free speech is not an independent value but a political prize." Regarding MCR: What bothers our campus conservatives isn't that they can't speak; it's that when they do, people find their ideas dumb and boring. The fetishization of free speech is an effort to obscure this inconvenient fact, to will the reality of their audience away. They cling to the belief that if the school just adopted the "right" rules, their classmates might finally grant them the respect they crave. But the function of their club is to support an authoritarian president, ushering in a quasi-fascist regime. I don't think it's going to work.

KEEPING TRADITION ALIVE: EMPOWER STUDENT ACTIVITES

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

Middlebury College hosts the country's oldest student-run carnival. For many students, the carnival, which typically runs for three days in February, is considered the pinnacle of the Middlebury experience, encapsulating student life in Vermont. This year, the 103rd winter carnival was no exception, and the editorial board commend the student organisers who continue to work to extend a rich tradition of student history. More broadly, the weekend speaks to what we call on the college to consider: Student events over overly bureaucratic, office-led programming.

This year, students sported the brightest neons to match the "après-ski" theme at the Snowbowl, while others ate smores at a bonfire and created ice sculptures outside of Proc. A sense of joy pulses throughout the community during the Carnival's duration. In a way, many students finally feel the campus come alive. At a time of increasing uncertainty on college campuses, and in the college environment here at the college, which often feels bogged down in division, the carnival was a reminder of the rich tradition this school has to share and the dedication that students, who are only transient stakeholders, have to maintain that tradition.

The main attraction for most students is the celebration of our NCAA Division I Nordic and Alpine ski teams at the Bowl. It provides students with an opportunity to rally around extraordinary and accomplished athletes while also celebrating what makes Middlebury special and unique. The races at the Bowl perfectly combine athletic achievement with a feeling of collective identity. Additionally, the proximity to the mountains and our natural environment is a testament to this quintessential Vermont tradition.

In the spirit of student-led tradition, the Editorial Board unanimously commended the success and hard work of the Middlebury College Activities Board (MCAB). Many of us attended these student-designed activities that epitomised the spirit of the Carnival, especially for those who might be less inclined to participate in the drinking culture that often envelops the Bowl's festivities. We discussed how student events inadvertently provided the substance-free programming that many college offices have struggled to offer. MCAB found a way to tap into the magical experience of winter in Vermont while simultaneously forging a sense of community and camaraderie in the student body.

For instance, those who attended the Winter Bash emphasized its thoughtful and impressive organization. The event included free food, live performances from Evo and Riddim, a DJ, and even a coat check. In addition, the Winter Carnival Ice Show was a fan favorite and displayed the talent and hard work of the skating club at Middlebury. It also became a way to involve the town in the Carnival with guest skaters and people of all ages showcasing their skills. Other activities included a guest hypnotist and comedian, free crewnecks on Proc terrace, and waffles and hot chocolate in Coltrane Lounge.

For a student-run weekend, we discussed how one non-student-led program, transportation to the snowbowl, left much to be desired. This year, students were not permitted to park at the Bowl or on Route 125 on Friday or Saturday. Instead, Middlebury provided free shuttle services every 30 minutes from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The Tri-Valley Transit, which normally transports students to the Bowl, was not providing any services. The buses were well-intentioned, an attempt to discourage drunk driving and limit overcrowding in the parking lot. However, the design showed serious flaws.

The Editorial Board described the bus system as a strange and stressful experience. Some people waited in line for over an hour to get to the slopes, only to ultimately decide it was not worth it. One bus even broke down halfway there. It is a shame that these people were unable to participate in the festivities due to limited accessibility. Many students became frustrated and upset, and, naturally, the concepts of respect and patience began to break down. In order to avoid drunk driving and irresponsible behavior, the alternative needs to actually work. Otherwise, all incentive to do the right thing disintegrates. We worry that the poor transport arrangements to the snowbowl will discourage students from using this safer mode of transport next year. Bus drivers and crowd managers were left to manage student lines, often in vain, because there was a lack of available transport.

While we, as students, are trying to keep our traditions alive, our administration might have undermined the overall success of the festive weekend with logistical challenges that dampened the experience for many. One potential solution to the transportation problem is to leverage our existing infrastructure and introduce student drivers and campus vans. The bus debacle, however, did have a silver lining: it reminded us of our potential to build a close-knit, supportive community. For example, many students who

parked at Rikert Outdoor Center were picked up by Middlebury alumni or friends on the way to the Bowl. In one sense, overcrowding and poor planning brought out the best of the Middlebury community. But in another, Middlebury showed a keen lack of awareness of the bowl's popularity (a 103-year-old event), underestimating the number of students who would line up for the buses. While students work hard to keep traditions alive, it seems Middlebury is more interested in mitigating risk than helping to create the inclusive, community-oriented campus culture we all strive for, one that Carnival could represent if done properly. The college communications office proudly advertised this student-run, century-old event. We ask that they ensure students can participate safely and fairly in this next year by providing more frequent, tangible transportation services to the snowbowl.

The Winter Carnival provided a momentary fracture in the daily rigor that pervades campus culture. Middlebury no longer felt "corporate," losing its bureaucratic exterior and revealing a vibrant underneath. This show of school spirit and pure elation is refreshing, but it is also sad that for many, it feels like a rarity. A Middlebury that fosters these feelings for more than three days need not feel far-fetched or unrealistic. We believe the answer lies with the students. Student activity is the only way to strengthen this temporary bliss into a more durable vivacity. Joy and passion are the byproducts of student music groups, dance groups, sports teams, and the upcoming Nocturne arts festival, a moment which feels similar to the student-run nature of the carnival. We are calling upon Middlebury to foster a culture in which students can express their creativity and talents without being burdened by tedious campus regulations and ineffective processes. To revitalize our school spirit, Middlebury must give the power back to the students and allow them to be at the center of the traditions that make our campus special.

WHO CAN AFFORD TO COMPETE? ATHLETIC AID AND ACCESS IN THE NESCAC

Op-Ed

Katherine Goodman *is a member of the class of 2028.*

Athletic scholarships are prohibited in the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC). The conference justifies this policy by emphasizing its "long tradition of success both in meeting high standards of athletic performance and academic excellence." The ideal NESCAC student is not defined solely as an athlete, but as a scholar first — one who attends a liberal arts institution to grow intellectually, socially and in their extracurriculars, while continuing to compete at a high level with academics as their top priority. Financial aid packages are awarded strictly through institutional financial aid offices and only after a student has been admitted, independent of athletic ability.

One of the major distinctions between Division I and Division III athletics lies in the recruiting process. At the Division III level, no coach can promise or guarantee admission. As a result, recruiting language takes on a different form. This is why Instagram commitment posts from Division III athletes often state that they are "committed to the admissions process." Unlike Division I recruits, these athletes cannot truly commit to a school in the traditional sense; if admissions approval does not follow, the symbolic commitment dissolves.

Meanwhile, Division I athletics has undergone a dramatic transformation. The introduction of Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) deals and, in some cases, direct compensation for athletes reflects a broader shift toward recognizing athletic labor as something worthy of financial reward. College sports are increasingly treated as a commercial enterprise, with athletes finally receiving a share of the value they generate.

The question, then, is whether this shift will eventually trickle down to Division III — and more specifically, to the NESCAC. Will athletic aid ever be awarded at this level?

In practice, the Division III recruiting process mirrors that of Division I. Competition is fierce, and earning a roster spot at a high-performing Division III program requires immense dedication. In many sports, the line between Division I and Division III competition is becoming increasingly blurred. Watching a high-level Division III game versus a lower-tier Division I matchup often reveals little difference in speed, skill or intensity.

Take Tufts University, a fellow NESCAC school, which defeated Dartmouth — a Division I Ivy League program — in men's lacrosse 15–9 in 2021. Or consider Middlebury's own field hockey program: eight NCAA championships in the past ten seasons, nine titles overall in 24 tournament appearances, and seven consecutive national championships from 2018 through 2024. Middlebury became the first program to win four straight national titles in 2021 and continued that streak for three more years. There is no question that this program is a national powerhouse. It is not unreasonable to speculate that against a lower-tier Division I opponent, the outcome would be competitive — if not decisive.

These examples illustrate a broader reality: Division I and Division III athletics are slowly but surely converging.

To even reach the collegiate level, high school athletes must devote extraordinary amounts of time and money to their sport. Costs include equipment, travel teams, flights, hotel stays, club dues, private trainers, gym memberships, recruiting camps and showcase fees. Over the past five years, families' spending on youth sports has increased by 46%. Beyond financial strain, student-athletes often sacrifice academic opportunities and personal time to remain competitive in the recruiting process.

COURTESY PHOTO / KATHERINE GOODMAN

Once on campus, the demands do not ease. Training at the Division III level — particularly in the NESCAC — closely mirrors that of Division I programs. Athletes participate in fitness testing, early-morning workouts, film sessions, scouting meetings and intensive practice schedules. When examined closely, the differences between Division I and Division III training demands are often marginal.

What makes the NESCAC distinct, however, is that athletes are expected to excel not only on the field but also in the classroom. While Division I athletes may receive tailored academic schedules designed to maximize athletic performance, NESCAC athletes balance rigorous academic workloads alongside elite competition. At schools like Middlebury, students are training at a national-championship level while preparing for careers as doctors, analysts, educators and leaders across fields.

This reality raises a difficult question: Do these athletes deserve to be compensated?

Athletic participation at this level is neither mentally nor physically inexpensive. As compensation models evolve in Division I, it is reasonable to ask whether those changes will eventually reach small colleges and Division III schools like Middlebury. Should Division III athletes — particularly in conferences as competitive as the NESCAC — receive athletic aid in recognition of the intensity, time commitment and financial burden associated with participation? Or would athletic scholarships undermine the conference's foundational commitment to prioritizing students first and athletes second?

The answer is not clear. But as the boundaries between divisions continue to erode, the question will only become harder to ignore.

SPECS Panther — Sexual pleasure is a human right: looking beyond scientific sexual models

Op-Ed

Laila Almefty-Hernandez *is a member of the class of 2026 and a SPECS Peer Educator.*

Black pioneers have long been at the forefront of advancing sexual health education, innovation, and reproductive justice. Leading figures like Dr. Joycelyn Elders, Byllye Avery, and Gosnell Duncan were pivotal to the development of sexual health and changed the way we understand the intersections of race, health, and class. Their contributions transformed the sexual health industry and improved medical outcomes for historically underserved communities. Despite these contributions, Black voices have been and continue to be marginalized and excluded from dominant conversations around sexual health. Mareisha Reese, president of a global diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice consulting firm, explains, "[T]he question is not whether Black history matters—because it does. The question is how we protect it, teach it honestly, and treat it as essential to understanding who we are as a nation."

Today, recognition of Black Americans and their significant contributions to society continues to be challenged, insulted, and erased. The removal of federally recognized holidays, like Juneteenth and Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and the erasure of historical monuments have led to the disappearance of crucial Black history from public archives. As we reflect on the need for transparency in teaching and honoring Black history, we celebrate the following Black Americans and innovators in the field of sexual and reproductive health and justice.

It would be inaccurate and inappropriate to start this article without discussing the historical context of Black sexual exploitation and abuse that serves as the backbone of modern knowledge of sexual health, specifically gynecology. Between 1844 and 1849, J. Marion Sims experimented on three enslaved women, Anarcha, Betsy, and Lucy, without anesthesia or consent. Sims, who is unfortunately idealized as the "father of gynecology," based his practice on the false, racist assumption that Black people did not feel pain the same way white people did, a myth that persists today. To learn more about the legacy and horrors of these racist foundations, please check out our previous SPECS Panther article; we will not let these horrors be the only stories we tell this Black History Month.

One of the most recognizable contributors to sexual health and education is Dr. Joycelyn Elders. Dr. Elders was the first Black female surgeon general of the United States. Her factual and open-conversation approach to sexual health was constantly attacked; however, she remained committed to establishing school health clinics, advocating for birth control de-stigmatization, and lowering the transmission of STIs through condom use. In her words, "Health is more than an absence of disease; it is about economics, education, environment, empowerment, and community. The health and well-being of the people is critically dependent upon the health system that serves them. It must provide the best possible health with the least disparities and respond equally well to everyone." During Dr. Elders' time as director of the Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas mandated an education curriculum that included sex education and substance-abuse prevention, nearly doubled childhood immunizations, expanded prenatal programs, and increased home-care options. At the age of 92, Dr. Elders continues to educate on public health topics and push for equal and accessible healthcare.

SPECS Panther is a mascot for SPECS (sex positive education for college students) and serves the Middlebury community. As a part of Health & Wellness Education, SPECS Panther seeks to educate and spark independent dialogue, not be the end-all be-all resource on campus. We encourage Midd Kids to break down the walls of silence by engaging in sex-positive conversation — wherever, with whomever and about whatever is most comfortable, easy, and safe for you. Our editions will be educational!

Equally transformative is the work of Byllye Avery. In 1947, Avery co-founded the Gainesville Women's Health Center, one of the first abortion clinics in the South run by and for women. Later, she founded the Black Women's Health Imperative, which reframed reproductive health as inseparable from economic stability, racial justice, and bodily autonomy. She was instrumental in shifting the conversation from a purely clinical perspective to one that included the psychological and emotional toll of living under racism and sexism. Avery's work emphasizes that sexual health cannot be separated from the broader context of Black experiences and well-being, and that every woman should have the opportunity to a self-directed and fulfilling reproductive life unencumbered by legal, social or financial barriers.

Gosnell Duncan, who created the modern silicone dildo, doesn't even have a Wikipedia page! The Grenadian engineer was partially paralyzed in an accident in 1965, leading to his involvement with disability rights groups, where barriers to sexual pleasure were common. This realization inspired Duncan's creation of the silicone dildo, one of the most ubiquitous sex toys ever, ranging in colors and accommodating a variety of mobility needs. Duncan is also credited with the creation of the first "feminist dildo," which was shaped like a finger or hand, and not a penis. Duncan is proof of the legacy of Black disabled innovators in sexual health.

By celebrating Black innovators at SPECS, we hope to emphasize that Black contributions to the field are not only historic; they are and have always been transformative, contemporary, and innovative.

The Middlebury Campus

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IT'S WUTHERING TIME: EMERALD FENNELL'S ' 'WUTHERING HEIGHTS' '

By VIRGINIA FRAU
Arts & Culture Editor

Digital discourse over representations of female sexuality, Victorian class-race politics and the proper use of quotation marks ensued after the release of Emerald Fennell's "'Wuthering Heights'" in theaters on Feb. 13. Since before the first trailer came out, the film adaptation of Emily Brontë's 1847 novel has threatened to create an internet dialogue more heated than the film's actual erotica.

"'Wuthering Heights'" tells the story of Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, respectively the daughter and the adoptive ward of a titled but impoverished Mr. Earnshaw living on the Yorkshire Moors. Mr. Earnshaw is a drunk, changeable, abusive father to the two children, but Heathcliff often shoulders the brunt of his brutality in order to protect Catherine. In adulthood, Catherine will marry the extravagantly wealthy Edgar Linton despite her love for Heathcliff. Five years later, the two reunite and begin an affair.

Predictably, the movie received criticism for its infidelity to its source material, which becomes more blatant as the film progresses. As such, the title was stylized with quotation marks, and Fennell clarified that her vision for the film was to "recreate the feeling of a teenage girl reading this book for the first time." On this front, I found that the movie represented itself quite well as a fantasy-romp: It seemed like something I might've experienced as a fever dream at 14 after reading "Wuthering Heights" for a sophomore English class. It takes clear inspiration from movies like Baz Luhrmann's "Romeo + Juliet" (1996) and Victor Fleming's "Gone with the Wind" (1939), and is probably more similar in theme to the latter than to Brontë's work at all.

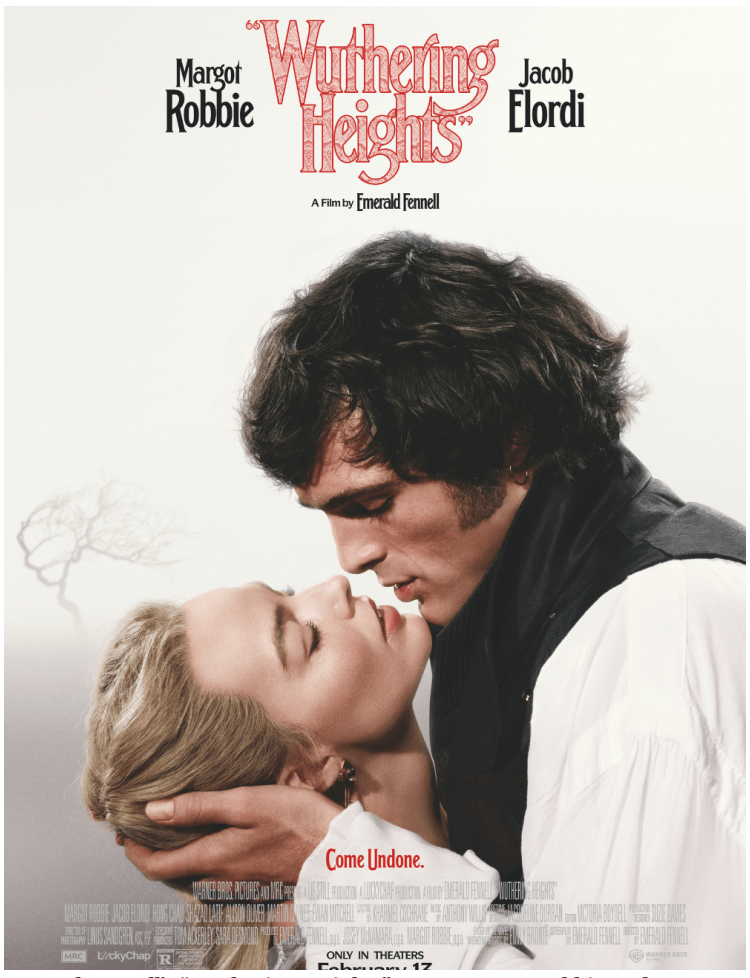
Any unfaithfulness in adapting the book didn't bother me — in truth, I wasn't expecting much. I'm of the belief that an awful adaptation can still make a good piece of original art (e.g. Joe Wright's "Pride & Prejudice" does a disservice to the novel's characters and tone but is beautifully shot and swoonworthy). And although it is through a perhaps overly contemporary lens, anyone who's read the original can vaguely trace Fennell's method of condensing a cast of 11 principal characters into just six, taking aspects of the novel's two romances (which differ in redeemability and tragedy) to make one comparatively tame tragic-romance.

Fennell's hallmark is her visual style. If you've seen "Saltburn" (2023), then you're familiar with her love of texture: gaudy fabrics, vivid colors and sensual interpretations of traditionally mundane items (in "'Wuthering Heights'", its egg yolks and bread dough and pig's feet and even slugs). She's particularly fond of the aesthetics of wealth and was meticulous in the design of the Thrushcross Grange set, where Catherine goes to live with her husband, Edgar. Fennell cited Victorian and Rococo styles in the set design and costuming. In the same way "Saltburn" might've been approaching 'camp', "'Wuthering Heights'" has gleefully entered that territory.

The aesthetics and visual symbolism become increasingly absurd as the film progresses — in one scene, comically high stacks of empty green liquor bottles indicate the depths of Mr. Earnshaw's alcoholism. Choices like these emphasize the importance of hedonism and over-indulgence in Fennell's characters. I've seen criticism that her characters, especially Heathcliff and Catherine, are lacking in depth, and while I think this is fair, I worry it misses the rather blunt thesis Fennell presents about humanity as a whole: every person is essentially amoral and even cruel in the pursuit of pleasure. To this end, her characters do not require individualism or even unique motivations, since it is taken for granted that they are all driven by the same base instincts.

This is one of the reasons I struggle to take the film's romance seriously, and I almost wonder whether, through no intention of the director's, it could subvert the romance genre entirely. Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship perfectly demonstrates the kind of emotionally hollow but sexually driven and possessive 'romance' that is so archetypal at the moment. In this way, the film seems to agree more with the work of the more moralistic Brontë sister, Charlotte (I say that as someone who prefers "Jane Eyre") than the nuanced character examinations of Emily's novel.

There are, however, two scenes that challenge this reading. In childhood, Heathcliff lies beside Catherine as she pretends to sleep, and he swears that he will always love her. Later, Heathcliff lies over a dead Catherine and begs her not to leave him, to 'haunt' him even in death (this does come from the book). These instances of tenderness might imply that the real tragedy of their relationship is that, beyond pleasure-driven and destructive exchanges, there was an unselfish love that was never fully realized.



Emeral Fennell's "Wuthering Heights" stars Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi.

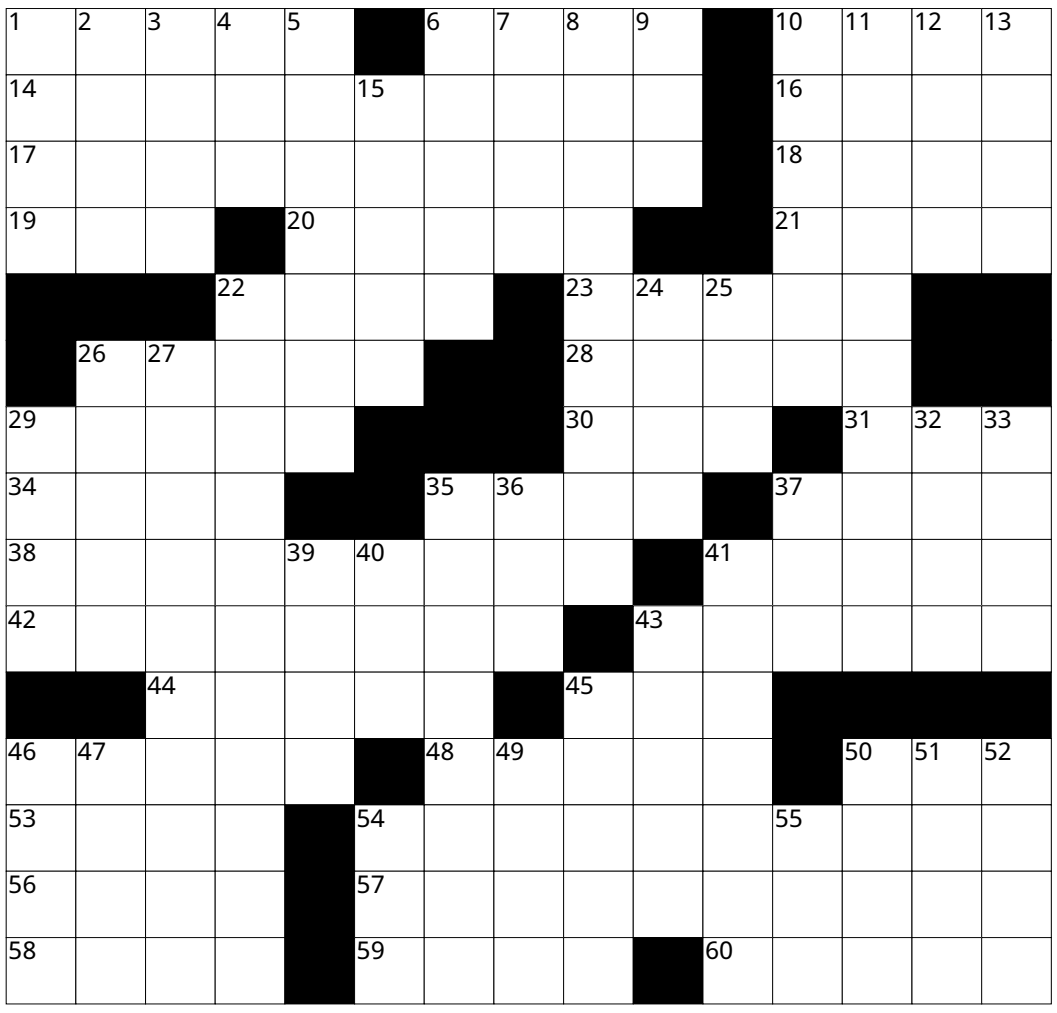
COURTESY PHOTO/WUTHERING HEIGHTS

Two Roads Diverged...

Avery Goldstein

ACROSS
1 Chilean range
6 JoJo of "Dance Moms" fame
10 Spot in the Senate
14 *Vermont-Connecticut highway that features a gorilla holding a car
16 Engrave
17 Applebee's rival
18 Spiced tea
19 Letters of distress
20 Morning-after pill brand
21 Pour
22 Connery of 007 fame
23 Turn yellow, like a banana
26 Desktop images
28 The 'gram
29 Pig sound
30 Genetic material
31 Deposit, as an egg
34 Busy as ___
35 Gear teeth
37 Alan of "M*A*S*H"
38 Army post in Maryland
41 *Golf course hazard
42 *Swap
43 Complains
44 Maya Angelou's "And Still ___"
45 "The Simpsons" bartender
46 1971 Elton John hit
48 Bell-bottoms feature
50 Uno + uno
53 Furniture store that sells meatballs
54 Campus coffee shop, and a hint to the intersection of the starred clues
56 Fuzzy fabric
57 Corporate dealmaker
58 Ben & Jerry's alternative
59 Really bright
60 "SNL" alum Cheri

DOWN
1 They may be liberal or fine
2 Nixed, at NASA
3 Bad things on records, for short
4 The SPDR S&P 500, e.g.
5 Eve's tempter
6 Family car
7 "Terrible" czar
8 *Local food house at Middlebury
9 Ques. response
10 Reason to pinky promise
11 *Green Mountain Boys leader
12 Berry in a bowl
13 ___ Mints
15 George Eliot's "___ Marner"
22 Reasons to sip tea with honey
24 Bed-and-breakfasts
25 Smokey Bear ad, e.g.
26 Place for unread emails
27 By force
29 Call from home?
32 "Zip-___-Doo-Dah"
33 Grunting oxen
35 Egg carton claim
36 "___ to Joy"
37 Shapiro of NPR
39 *Primary
40 Nav. rank
41 "Toodle-oo!"
43 Bottom of the barrel
45 Ramsey of yodeling fame
46 Board game with pink and blue pegs
47 Squeezed (out)
49 Target's is a bull's-eye
50 Prom partner
51 Stench
52 Antidepressant type, in brief
54 Anderson Cooper's channel
55 ___ milk

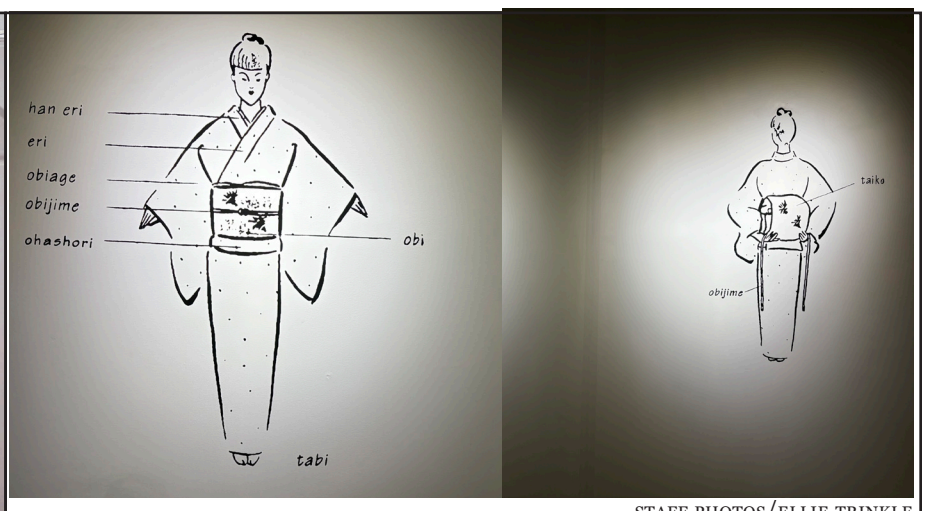


WEAVING HISTORY: A LOOK INTO JOHNSON GALLERY'S "CULTURAL FABRICS" EXHIBIT

By LIZI SCHIERMAN and ELLIE TRINKLE
Layout Editor and Senior Arts & Culture Editor

"Cultural Fabrics: The Kimono Through Literary, Cross-Cultural, and Practical Lenses" commenced the Johnson Exhibition Gallery's spring program on Feb. 9. The photos below present a small glimpse into the exhibit, but of course cannot fully encapsulate it in all its glory, so be sure to check it out before it closes on March 19.

The exhibit boasts an impressive list of collaborators that spans from Japan to Middlebury. Kazi and Wallace L.M. Alward, MD — family members of renowned Japanese dancer Sally Toshiko Pierce — donated the Taishō kimonos for one of the gallery's exhibits last year, inspiring the current exhibit.

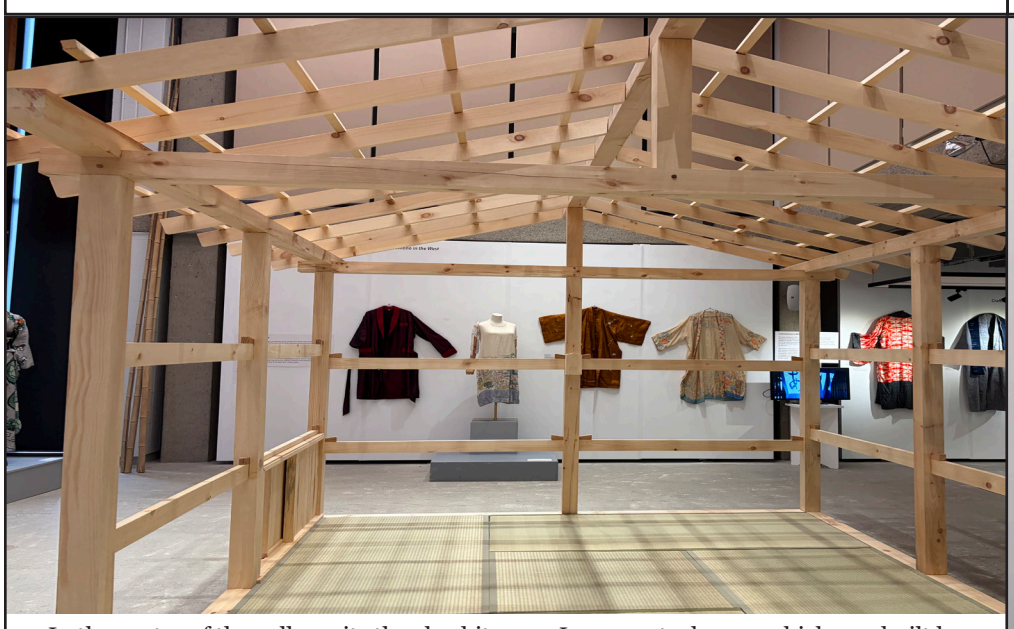


STAFF PHOTOS/ELLIE TRINKLE

Diagrams dissecting the different parts of the Kimono, which is made of a long piece of fabric that is then cut into small sections and sewn together by hand. The sign next to the diagrams describes that the Kimono was formed during the Edo period (1615-1858), when the Tokugawa family established strict rule over Japan. This put the country in its longest stretch of peace, leading to increased focus on art and fashion.

Walking past the diagrams, you'll be greeted with "The Kimono in Literature" section, which discusses the impact of "The Tale of Genji" during the Heian period (794-1185). The Black Genji haori features a shibagaki ☐☐ motif popular during the Heian period, and the Cream Genji kimono features details of aristocrats dressed in Heian-period clothing.

Then comes the Taishō period (1912-1926), marked by brighter, bolder designs. The red Taishō kimono "proposed a new interpretation of romanticism, expressed through the original individual interpretations of the traditional culture," reads the gallery label.



In the center of the gallery sits the chashitsu, or Japanese teahouse, which was built by 12 students this past J-Term. Taught by Vermont-based boatbuilder Douglas Brooks, the course followed an apprentice pedagogy, with numerous lectures taught in silence so students could learn solely from observing Brooks.

"I thought that it really contributed to an environment that was conducive to learning and being immersed in the experience", Met Ly '28 said, speaking on Brooks' silent instruction.

The teahouse also features the nijiriguchi, a small sliding door for guests to enter on their hands and knees. As the gallery label illustrates, "...it is believed that crawling into the space equalizes everyone despite their social rank."

"There's a concern around cultural appropriation, but he's [Brooks] very wary of that. I feel like he's taking a lot of care and consideration to both the class and the ceremony to make sure that we're not just culturally appropriating the Japanese way of life. It's very intentional in a lot of ways. The ceremony really emphasized the fact that Shintoism is a very inclusive faith system," Ly said, describing the tea ceremony that took place over J-Term.

"It was really fun and it was a very satisfying way to conclude the one month as well to sort of have a big celebration for that and it felt like a really nice wrap up to the whole experience," Ly said. w

In the 1940s and 50s, the Kimono shifted from a staple of everyday life to a garment that represented an elevated status. This was largely due to the scarcity of cloth during the Allied Occupation of Japan, which caused the kimono to be remade into a more "Western style." In the center stands the intricately golden uchikake ☐☐, a wedding garment made with embroidered silk.

The exhibit also features insight into the crafting of the kimono through the shibori dyeing process. As the gallery label describes, "Shibori includes twisting, pleating, wrapping, stitching, knotting, and clamping cloth to create intricate patterns where the cloth 'resists' being penetrated by the dye."

Guests can see and feel the different techniques used in the interactive "Shibori Petting Zoo" and learn how to fold an origami kimono at another interactive station in the exhibit.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Western world became fixated with Japanese clothing, transforming the kimono into a staple of Western loungewear and an item so valuable that people sought to collect it. The three garments depicted above help illustrate the large shift in the kimono's shape and cultural meaning.

"For Professor Summer Lee Jack, History of Western Dress, I did my final paper on the Japanese Edo period and the koso, which is the more primitive form of the kimono we know today. I wrote a paper on that just because I was interested by myself. After my professor read it, she asked me to join her on this exhibit," Josie Coan '29 said about her initial involvement in the exhibit.

For locating the red bathrobe (left), Coan described her process as a research assistant for the exhibit.

"I was able to find a similar piece on Etsy that gave me roughly the year — you can never be too sure, it's usually a 10—20 year range. I was able to find where the hotel was and around what year it's from."

Editor's Note: Met Ly '28 is a News Editor for The Campus.

SPRING SPORTS PREVIEWS

COURTESY PHOTO / STOCKTON PHOTO

The acrobatics of Gabe Harris '25 after baseball's 2025 NESCAC championship win

By KANAN CLIFFORD, THIE HARTHONO, THEO MANIATIS, SIMON SCHMIEDER
Sports Editors

Baseball

Head Coach: Mike Leonard

Athletes to Watch: Chase Zidlicky '29, Will Ashley '27, Aiden Han '27

After having won the NESCAC tournament three out of the past four years, Middlebury baseball will start from scratch again. Kyle McCausland '25 and Nathan Samii '25 graduated last spring, both All-Americans and prolific power hitters. The team is also younger, with ten freshmen compared to just two seniors. Despite the shake-up, there's no doubt this team will be vying for a NESCAC championship come May. Returning to the helm is the program's most successful coach, Mike Leonard. His freshman slinger, Chase Zidlicky '29, looks promising on the mound, accompanied by six additional freshmen pitchers. And in the batter's box, juniors Aiden Han '27 and Will Ashley '27 will lead the offense. Opening day is scheduled for this Saturday in Middlebury against Colby-Sawyer College — as long as there's no snow. With a series under their belt, the team then flies to Atlanta for a big matchup against Emory. Later in the spring, look out for two series against NESCAC opponents Colby and Amherst.

Key Competitions: Colby-Sawyer College (Home – Feb. 28), Emory (Away – Mar. 7), Amherst (Home – Apr. 3)

Softball

Head Coach: Kelly Bevere '99

Athletes to Watch: Jen Westphal '26 , Kristyn Carroll '26, Emily Ye '28

Middlebury softball looks to reach the NESCAC tournament for a fifth year running. It's been 15 years since the program marched past Tufts to win itstheir sole NESCAC trophy, and there's reason to believe it could happen again. Head coach Kelly Bevere returns for her 19th season as the winningest coach in team history. Senior Kristyn Caroll '26 will lead the offense, finishing last spring with a whopping .496 batting average and 1.239 OPS. Behind the plate, catcher Jen Westphal '26 (who boasted a .366 average herself) will frame pitches for Emily Ye '28, the team's ace. Six new first years also hope to make an early impact. The group opens their season at home on Mar. 7 against Plattsburgh State. Later in the spring, they travel to Medford to face reigning NESCAC champions Tufts, and return to Middlebury on May 2nd for the last series of the year: a crucial matchup against Wesleyan.

Key Competitions: Plattsburgh State (Home – Mar. 7), Tufts (Away – Apr. 18), Wesleyan (Home – May 2)

Women's Lacrosse

Head Coach: Kate Livesay '03

Athletes to Watch: Caroline Adams '26, Skyler Lach '26, Caroline Messer '26

Women's lacrosse returns to the field on the back of five straight NCAA championships. Last season, the program graduated Hope Shue '25 , two-timetwo time Division III player of the year, the program's all-time leader in points and goals — the list goes on. Although Shue has left, much of the program's core remains, all of whomwho boast extensive championship pedigreespedigree. Kate Livesay comes back for her 11th season as the winningest head coach in team history. The offense also remains in good hands, led by third team all-american Caroline Adams '26 and Skylar Lach '26. And on defense end, Caroline Messer '26 returns for her final season, a year after making the NCAA all-tournament team. The Panthers begin their championship hunt against Bowdoin this Saturday at home. Down the line, they travel to Medford to play the reigning NESCAC champions, Tufts, before coming home to face Wesleyan, who upset Middlebury in the conference tournament last spring.

Key Competitions: Bowdoin (H – Feb. 28), Tufts (A – Mar. 28), Wesleyan (H – Apr. 4)

Men's Lacrosse

Head Coach: Dave Campbell '00

Athletes to Watch: Logan White '26, Drew Drummer '26, Hayden Kern '26

Head Coach Dave Campbell leads Middlebury men's lacrosse for the 20th season. Under his leadership, the program has appeared in the NESCAC championship game eight times and reached the semifinals 13 times, includingmade the semifinal for the 13th time last season. In order to contend for the conference title, the team must step up their mid-table offense, which lost all-time program assist leader and second all-time scorer Billy Curtis '25. Captain Logan White '26 is the player to watch in the attack. Captain and long stick midfielder (LSM) Drew Drummer '26 sits fourth all-time on the program's forced turnover list and will look to add to his tally. Captain Hayden Kern '26 will guard the goal; he sits fourth all-time on the program list with 654 saves. Eliminated from last spring's NESCAC tournament by Tufts, Middlebury will face the Jumbos on Mar. 28 at home. Senior days against Amherst and Williams round out the regular season.

Key Competitions: Tufts (Home – Mar. 28), Amherst (Home – Apr. 18), Williams (Home – Apr. 22)

Women's Tennis

Head Coach: Olivia Leavitt

Athletes to Watch: Lulu Wu '26, Elsie Van Wieren '28, Ren Barton '298

Beginning the fall with the Panther Challenge tournament at home, the women's tennis team recorded numerous strong performances throughout the short campaign. Lulu Wu '26 and Elsie Van Wieren '28 went 3–0 in their respective singles matches at the tournament. In the ITA Regional Championships the next weekend, Gusty Beveridge '28 advanced to the singles "A" draw quarterfinals, while Ren Barton '28 won the singles "B" bracket. By the end of their three fall tournaments, Wu also surpassed 60 career singles wins and 50 career doubles wins. Resuming play this weekend, the team heads to Tennessee for the ITA Indoor Nationals tournament after qualifying for the first time. As the defending NESCAC champions, the women's tennis team will look to recreate their dominance from last spring in both the tournament and the regular season.

Key Competitions: ITA Indoor Nationals (Away – Feb. 27-Mar. 1), Wesleyan University (Away – Mar. 8), Hamilton College (Home – Apr. 19)

Men's Tennis

Head Coach: Andrew Thomson '10

Athletes to Watch: Julian Wu '26, Noah Lewis '27, Thehan Wijemanne '27

Middlebury men's tennis begins the season ranked ninth in the country and opens itstheir conference title defense on Feb. 28 at #20 Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. They are coached by Andrew Thomson '10, who has won three NESCAC titles in seven seasons leading the program. Julian Wu '26 finished the fall season strong, winning the singles "A" bracket at the Skidmore Open , and the doubles "A" bracket with partner Noah Lewis '27. Thehan Wijemanne '27 returns from abroad after being named to the All-American doubles team last fall. With captains Noah Laber '25 and Neel Epstein '25 graduating last spring, the reloaded roster features four first years, whose contributions will be key to a deep postseason run. Middlebury will look to redeem regular-seasonregular season losses against #4 Claremont-Mudd-Scripps and #3 Tufts, and especially versus #7 Bowdoin (Senior Day) in their final matchup of the regular season.

Key Competitions: Claremont-Mudd-Scripps (Away – Mar. 28), Tufts (Home – Apr. 12), Bowdoin (Home – Apr. 26)

Women's Track & Field

Head Coach: Martin Beatty '84

Athletes to Watch: Claire Palmer '29, Jazmyn Hurley '29, Olive Lawrence '26

The women's track & field team has been having an electric indoor campaign, headlined by numerous records broken over the weekenda weekend of numerous broken records in the middle of February. At the BU Valentine Invitational, Claire Palmer '29 ran a 5:01 for a career best in the mile while Jazmyn Hurley '29 rewrote the school record in the 200m. In the Tufts Cupid Challenge that same weekend, Olive Lawrence '26 broke the 60m dash school record for the second time this winter. Program records in the shot put and 60m hurdles were set at the same meet. The team has great momentum heading into the DIII New England Championships this weekend, and with the San Diego trip fast approaching, the Panthers will be plotting on how to further raise the bar..

Key Competitions: Mangrum Invitational (Away – Mar. 27), NESCAC Championships (Away – Apr. 25-26), Farley Inter Regional Extravaganza (Away – May 8-9)

Men's Track & Field

Head Coach: Martin Beatty '84

Athletes to Watch: Benjamin Hughes '27, Donnell Harvey Jr. '28, Jed Nelson '26.57

After the serenity of a few home meets, the men's track & field team almost exclusively competed in Boston for the remainder of their indoor season. The DIII New England Championships take place this weekend, and the team has already posted a string of impressive results as they move towards the outdoor season. Benjamin Hughes '27 ran a 4:09 mile in early February, winning the MNESCI meet. At the BU Valentine Invitational, the team saw three separate runners finish under 50

SPRING SPORTS PREVIEWS

Continued from page 11

seconds in the 400m, along with a career-best 22.16-second 200m from Donnell Harvey Jr. ’28. Jed Nelson ’27 set his own career best in the triple jump the weekend prior, simultaneously breaking the school record. The Panthers can look forward to a couple of meets during their annual San Diego trip over the break, marking the official start to the spring season— and their defense of last year’s NESCAC title.

Key Competitions: Mangrum Invitational (Away – Mar. 27), NESCAC Championships (Away – Apr. 25-26), Farley Inter Regional Extravaganza (Away – May 8-9)

Men’s Golf

Head Coach: Justin Kumpulanian

Athletes to Watch: Charlie Schulman ’26, Logan Wang ’27

Following a fantastic 3rd place finish at the home Duke Nelson Invitational, Middlebury men’s golf trailed off towards the end of the fall season. However, their freshman core leaves plenty of room for excitement. Jake Forrest ’29, Lincoln Mackay ’29 and Evan Fulgieri ’29 look to build on their impactful fall seasons, where Mackay paced the Panthers with a T6 at the Williams Invitational, and Fulgieri and Forrest both contributed multiple starts and top-20 finishes. Complementing the young trio is senior Charlie Schulman ’26, with an individual win and four top-10 finishes in five fall tournaments. Though the ground is frozen, men’s golf is hard at work at the indoor simulator, and will look to gel during their annual spring break trip before kicking off the season in Connecticut at the Bantams/Hawks Invitational.

Key Competitions: Bantams/Hawks Invitational (Away – Apr. 4-5), NESCAC Championships (Away – Apr. 24)

Women’s Golf

Head Coach: Tim Walko

Athletes to Watch: Ella Han ’27, Season Wei ’29, Morgan Lee ’26

Middlebury women’s golf opens the spring season coming off a consistently mediocre fall, where the group finished fifth in all four tournaments. The reigning NESCAC champions lost star golfer Audrey Tir’ 25, who led the team to an overall T6 finish at the NCAA national championship and finished T12 individually. However, two key members of last year’s dream team remain at Middlebury — Ella Han ’27 (who finished 6th at the NESCACs and 22nd at the national championships) and Morgan Lee ’26 (10th and T23, respectively). Last year’s team also struggled in the fall before recording an impressive spring season and a NESCAC victory. This team has proven winners — Lee and Han — and impressive new faces such as Season Wei ’29, who finished T15 at the Williams Fall Invitational and 17th at the Polar Bear Shootout. The pieces are there, but the question remains: Can they find the killer instinct that won them a NESCAC title?

Key Competitions: Jack Leamen Invitational (Away – Apr. 11-12), NESCAC Invitational (Away – May 1)

Editor’s Note: Schmieder ’26 is the Senior Sports Editor. Clifford ’28.5, Harthono ’28 and Maniatis ’28.5 are Sports Editors.

LESSONS FROM WOMEN’S HOCKEY COACH BILL MANDIGO

By THEO MANIATIS
Sports Editor

COURTESY PHOTO / WILL COSTELLO

Mandigo coaches his team in the huddle

Middlebury women’s hockey became a varsity sport in 1981, and eight years later, Bill Mandigo took over at the helm. He’s won 697 games with Middlebury since then, the most of any coach in NCAA women’s hockey history.

Mandigo attended college at Wesleyan, where he played football, hockey and baseball — all sports he would later coach at Middlebury. During his time in Connecticut, he always admired the lives of his numerous coaches.

“You get to wear different hats, meet different people and have new experiences,” Mandigo said. “I thought that was awesome when I was at Wesleyan, and that’s what attracted me to go coach in the NESCAC.”

Since coming to Vermont in 1988, Mandigo has won four NCAA championships, 12 NESCAC championships and 12 Coach of the Year awards. Despite his resume, though, Mandigo prefers a low profile, insisting that the bulk of the credit should go to his players. Only after several unanswered emails, text messages and a couple of trips to his office in Kenyon Arena did he agree to talk about the lessons from coaching one of Middlebury’s most successful teams.

From 1992 to 1999, Middlebury went seven years without losing a DIII game. Beginning in those early seasons — and continuing to the present — Mandigo gave the locker room a lot of ownership. The players took charge, both on the ice and with community service in town.

“Every once in a while you have to give them a nudge one way or another way,” Mandigo said.

The Panthers continued their dominance into the next millennium. On Mar. 9, 2003, they traveled to Maine to face an undefeated Bowdoin team, the first time in recent memory not entering the NESCAC playoffs as favorites. Three days later, a Middlebury Campus headline read, “Women’s Hockey Regains League Control With Bowdoin Thrashing.” The Panthers had won 4–0.

“They loved to compete, they wanted to win… they wanted to play,” Mandigo said.

Yet twenty years later, that trip to Maine is a distant memory, a reminder that four years in college go by in a flash.

“Even sitting in this office and in this chair, it’s not the same as playing,” Mandigo said. “Playing is so much better, it’s so much more important. We talk all the time about the privilege that you have that you get to compete.” One of the program’s keys to success has been taking the privilege to play seriously.

The seasons kept flying by as players cycled in and out of Chip Kenyon Arena. In 2016, Mandigo coached his daughter to a NESCAC championship. But the best was still to come. In 2022, Middlebury women’s hockey went undefeated in its first 26 games and won its conference championship before facing Gustavus Adolphus College in the NCAA final. At home, in front of a capacity crowd, Ellie Barney ’22 scored the winner for the Panthers in the 13th minute of overtime.

How was it possible that a squad coming off a cancelled season (due to COVID) became the first Division III women’s hockey team to finish a season with a perfect record? Mandigo reckons it was because of their relentless ambition.

“I wouldn’t say that team was tremendously skillful,” he said. “I think they worked really hard, they really liked each other — they appreciated the opportunity to play hockey because it had been taken away from them for a year and a half.”

> “We talk all the time about the privilege that you have that you get to compete.”

As of today, Middlebury’s women’s hockey ranks #5 nationally. During practice, they hear the same lessons Mandigo told his first team back in 1988. “Control what you can control,” is one of his most enduring mantras. “The referees make a bad call, you can’t control that, can you? So don’t dwell on it, don’t worry about it,” Mandigo said. Admittedly, that rule won’t stop him from letting the referees know about a bad call.

COURTESY PHOTO / NATHANAEL LEPAGE

Mandigo and assistant coach Emily McNamara talk strate

Another lesson is not to judge success by the trophy cabinet. “At the end of the day, you have to be able to look yourself in the mirror and say you did the best you could,” Mandigo said. “If everyone can do that, win, lose or draw, if you leave it all on the ice, that’s what matters.”

Sitting in his office in Chip Kenyon Arena, Mandigo looked back on the last four decades: generations of players, a storied program and one coach. “I’ve had chances to leave, and it’s kind of hard to believe I’ve been here 38 years,” he reflected. “Every time I think about it, I’m like: where has the time gone?” He’s proud not only of the championships, but of the thousands of community service hours his teams have invested. Meg Simon ’26 was recently named a finalist for the 2026 Hockey Humanitarian Award. And Mandigo loves it when former players write him notes or even invite him to weddings.

As the interview came to a close, there was still a half-finished can of Diet Coke on the desk. I went to throw it out, but Mandigo quickly stopped me. The last, and undoubtedly most important lesson of the day: “Don’t ever waste a Diet Coke.”

> “At the end of the day, you have to be able to look yourself in the mirror and say you did the best you could.”

CHAINSAWS AND HOUSE MUSIC: NORDIC SKIING AT WINTER CARNIVAL

By SIMON SCHMIEDER
Senior Sports Editor

There's a certain comfort in knowing that not only Middlebury's Nordic skiers, but almost all Nordic skiers, wear their hats in a similar fashion. In fact, if the objective (functional or aesthetic) is to position one's hat as parallel to the ground and as high above the ears as possible, then the Panthers had most teams beat at the Middlebury Carnival. The same goes for their performances last weekend.

The home carnival, which doubled as the Eastern Intercollegiate Ski Association (EISA) championships, began with the 7.5k classic individual start on Friday morning. Similar to the time trials of professional cycling tours, the race requires each competitor to begin in 30-second intervals. The staggered starts prevent packs from forming, and although the course is more navigable during the race, the competitive spirit of racing in a group is partially sacrificed.

The Middlebury men's Nordic squad set the tone in the opening race of the weekend. Facing a Dartmouth team headlined by John Steel Hagenbuch, who arrived fresh off a 14th-place finish in the 10k interval start free and 6th in the 4 x 7.5k relay at the Winter Olympics, the Panthers finished second overall with the help of multiple standout performances. The team was led by Mason Wheeler '26 (fourth), Abrahm Geissinger '29 (10th) and Peter Warner '27 (13th).

"Shoutout to Abrahm Geissinger, he had a ripper day," teammate Finn Veit '29 said. "I think it's the best result of the season."

Shortly after the final men's competitors trickled in, the Middlebury women's Nordic team raced to a strong fourth place as a team. Shea Brams '26 (fifth) was the first Panther to cross the finish, followed by Sofia Scririca '27 (14th) and Beth McIntosh '29 (15th). The Dartmouth team proved a formidable challenge again, placing five skiers in the top ten.

A significant share of the Panthers' successes on Friday is owed to precise ski tuning. It's paramount that the skis are treated with a suitable wax based on temperature, humidity, and snow type. The benefits of a well-chosen wax were especially evident on Friday.

With classic skiing (akin to running) in the 7.5k race, the balance between glide wax at the front and back of the skis and kick wax underfoot could substantially impact one's race. Trudging uphill, competitors without the right kick wax began to slip far earlier and were forced to run with their skis in a "V" shape. But Middlebury's skiers were able to retain their form longer thanks to the team's wax technicians' tuning setup.

"We have a team of wax techs who get up here obscenely early [when] we have a race and are testing skis the moment the sun comes up," Wheeler said. "It takes an entire village."

"They are the unsung heroes of ski racing," Veit echoed.

The Nordic races resumed on Saturday with the 20k mass start. Competitors skate skied four laps of the 5k course, and unlike Friday, began as an entire field. On the heels of heavy Friday night snowfall, the racing loops were covered in fresh snow for the start of the men's race. It only took one lap for the new snow to break up, however, resulting in battleground conditions for the skiers at Rikert. Skiing efficiently, as Wheeler explained, "went out the window."

The men secured a fifth-place team finish, with Wheeler tying for 10th towards the front. Veit followed close behind for 13th, while Geissinger tied for 28th. The Middlebury women produced another fourth-place overall result, led again by Brams in eighth. Mica Bodkins '26 followed in ninth, and Scirica rounded out the Panthers' top three in 12th.

"It was so fun to ski the whole 5k with everyone," Bodkins said. "I couldn't stop smiling."

"It's our last carnival of our whole EISA career so it was a great way to top it off," Brams said as she stood beside Bodkins following the race.

To end an EISA career with the Middlebury Carnival is special for the Panthers' skiers, although its significance goes beyond merely racing at home. The plain thrill on Saturday was palpable, even as a spectator. Students, families, community members and other competitors created an atmosphere that combined the frenzy of a cross-country race, the quirks of Nordic skiing and the rowdiness of a college party.

COURTESY PHOTO / DAVE BRAMS

Kjersti Moritz '28, the winner of the giant slalom on Saturday

"There's nothing like the Middlebury Carnival," race announcer Caio Brown '26 said after Saturday's race.

"The Middlebury Carnival's got that special something... skiing up that hill and getting hit by a wall of sound is amazing," Wheeler added.

"That hill" was the heartbeat of the race course. Numerous party speakers blasting house music practically made the snow vibrate, and Middlebury's cheer squad revved chainsaws (without the saw) as competitors skied by. The air smelled like gasoline as cheers infiltrated the woods, and hordes of spectators dashed between course segments to catch an extra look at the skiers. Some sank into waist-deep snow on the sides of the trail. By the last lap of the women's race, multiple onlookers were shirtless as they shouted their support.

The Nordic races at the Middlebury Carnival embodied a carnival in the purest sense of the word. While many intuitively flock to the Snowbowl to conduct their carnival reveling, a unique, potent energy could also be experienced at Rikert this weekend. Consider making it a destination for any future carnivals — if anything, you'll stay warmer from all the running and yelling.

MIDDLEBURY WINTER CARNIVAL: MORE THAN A RACE

By VIKTOR KORTE
Contributing Writer

The voice on the loudspeaker cuts through the cold air as skiers push out of the start gate, carving tight arcs through a course lined with students in extravagant après-ski outfits. The snow at the base is packed down and crunches under boots, despite the six inches of fresh powder from the night before. Parents, alumni, professors and students come together at the Snowbowl to celebrate one of the most notable events of the year, cheering for Middlebury around the base of the mountain and along the sideline fencing.

The Middlebury Winter Carnival is not just a ski race weekend. It is a rare moment when the campus turns fully toward the mountain, with everyone celebrating ski and après ski culture. As the oldest winter carnival in the country, this event is a Middlebury signature.

Middlebury's alpine team performed well on Saturday, clinching two wins out of four races. Kjersti Moritz '28 won the women's giant slalom (GS) in 1:59:68, earning the maximum 50 Eastern Intercollegiate Ski Association (EISA) points for the Panthers.

Following Moritz was Kaite Fynn '26, who finished sixth, and Sophia Palmquist '29, who trailed her in seventh, giving Middlebury three top-seven finishes in the GS. In the women's slalom, Reagan Harrison '29 tied with Palmquist for fifth in 1:39.70, adding 37 points each for Midd. To strengthen the team score, Sophia Tozzi '26 finished in 11th, tallying another 29 points.

COURTESY PHOTO / STEPHEN CLOUTIER

Middlebury students, parents, professors, alumni and community members showed their support throughout the weekend

The men's slalom was decisive. Thomas Carnahan '29 captured the win in 1:38.63. Starting 11th, he finished the race almost a full second in front of the first-seeded Dartmouth skier.

"Although crossing the finish line in first place was an incredible feeling, seeing my team run up to me made it that much more special," Carnahan said. "From the early morning training sessions to the many hours we spent in the gym before winter, I have never seen a group of people work so hard collectively while also caring so deeply about each individual on the team."

Carnahan's impressive win was reinforced by Sebastian Segre '26 in eighth, Julian Arthur '29 in ninth, and Milan Novak '28 in 11th, giving Middlebury a major boost in points. In the men's giant slalom, Nicholas Unkovskoy '27 placed fifth, with Julian Arthur finishing ninth and Toby Jennings '28 in 10th.

The home carnival also served as the EISA Championship, and final scores were determined by combining alpine and Nordic performances over Friday and Saturday. With the help of Alpine victories and podium finishes, Middlebury finished second with 808.5 points. Dartmouth College took the crown with 982.5 points, and with UVM in third, the 2026 podium mirrored that of last year's carnival.

The competition of the Middlebury Carnival may take place in the mountains but the overall carnival experience extends beyond. Although it may have been cold on Saturday morning, the true carnival enthusiasts gathered early among a sea of fur hats and neon ski suits outside the Townhouses, celebrating in igloos before heading to the Snowbowl.

Each year, the lawn outside the Townhouses becomes a sea of fur hats, neon ski suits, beanies, quirky sunglasses and bell-bottom ski pants.

"Seeing everyone in colorful ski outfits celebrating skiing and winter is a staple of being a student at Middlebury," Henry Putnam '28 said.

Students also participated in the annual ice sculpting competition and attended the annual Winter Bash, featuring performances by DJ A-Trak and dance troupes RIDDIM and Evolution in the Nelson Recreation Center.

"Winter Carnival is something everyone looks forward to in the middle of the long Vermont winter," Sam Stephens '28 said. "It's one of those weekends that makes you feel so grateful for the community here."

"Winter carnival is one of those few highly anticipated campus events that brings everyone together," Namrita Ghani '28 added.

The weekend was not without its hiccups, however. In previous years, students could drive to and park at the Snowbowl. This year, to reduce congestion, parking at the Bowl was limited, and the school organized shuttle buses to transport students to and from the mountain. Yet three buses — especially when one breaks down on the way to Hancock — was ultimately a conservative number for the hundreds of students trying to make it to the bowl.

After a weekend of spirited celebration, quiet and focus return to Middlebury as week three of the spring semester starts. Baby febs must now realize that Carnival weekend is, unfortunately, not representative of every weekend at Midd. Sunday is spent at the Davis Family Library, and sleep schedules are regulated once more. As campus readjusts, the lingering feeling of winter celebrations and school spirit reinforces the sentiment that Middlebury's collective identity is carved as much into the slopes above town as into the classrooms below.